

ON THE PROBLEM OF THE TEXT OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

The extant Vedic Literature provides ample evidence to show that parallel to the religio-philosophical compositions there existed in this period a stream of secular writing. The frequent occurrence of the terms 'ākhyāna', 'itihāsa', 'purāṇa' and 'gāthā' points to the existence of writings having profane subject-matter. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa says that on the occasion of an *Aśvamedha* the *brāhmaṇa* (priest) sings by day the religious acts (of the *Yajamāna*), while at night the *kṣatriya* recites 'gāthās' to glorify his martial deeds.¹ Distinguishing a 'ṛcā' from a 'gāthā', the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa says, the former deals with gods while the latter deals with men.² The Brāhmaṇa-texts frequently employ the word 'nārāśaṃsī' along with 'gāthā', which emphasizes the anthropocentric character of such writings.

The existence of a stream of secular writings in the Vedic period is further corroborated by the frequent occurrence of such words as 'aitihāsikāḥ', 'paurāṇikāḥ', 'kuśilavāḥ' and 'sūtāḥ' as opposed to the 'ṛṣis' and (*brāhmaṇa* -) *ṛtviks*, the repositories of revealed writings. Among these, the 'kuśilavas' were roving minstrels who entertained their audience by reciting orally in an emotional manner the composi-

N.B. References from the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are given from the Critical Editions of Baroda and Poona respectively.

1. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIII 1/5/5-6, Eng. Transl., Eggeling, J., Delhi, 1966.

2. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VII-18, (Vedic Index, Vol. II, p. 224), Delhi, 1967.

tions of others, often to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. The 'sūtas' constituted a hybrid class, being the offspring of a *kṣatriya* father and a *brāhmaṇa* mother, and inheriting the characteristics of both the parents. They had an inborn faculty of composing verses and a spontaneous appreciation for martial exploits. Usually they were attached to a particular prince or royal family. Presumably the 'aitihāsikas' and 'paurāṇikas' were also homogeneous classes. The *Rāmākathā* originated in these circles. Modern scholars are unanimous in recognizing the existence of stray legends and ballads prior to the composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* also furnishes some valuable evidence about its origin and character. In I 5/1 it says that the 'ākhyāna', well-known by the name *Rāmāyaṇa*, originated in the family of the Ikṣvākus. In I 4/25 it again refers to the entire composition as an 'ākhyāna' being recited by Kuśa and Lava. In VII 100/26, the last verse of the epic, the entire narrative is again extolled as an 'ākhyāna', known as *Rāmāyaṇa*, the composition of Vālmīki. In I 2/29ff. Brahmā directs Vālmīki to present in a poetic form the entire *Rāmācarita*, the outline of which he had received from (the divine minstrel), Nārada. In I 1/78 the account of Nārada is also referred to as an 'ākhyāna'. In I 3/1 it is pointed out that Vālmīki (in addition to what he had received from Nārada) further collected facts relating to *Rāmācarita*. In I 5/4 and I 4/5-8 it is indicated that Vālmīki incorporated into his poem a good deal of material relating to the 'trivarga', for he (did not conceive his poem as a mere chronicle of Rāma's life, but) intended it to become on the one hand an instrument of preaching and promoting the Vedic values and on the other hand a source of aesthetic delight. Lastly, in I 5/4-5 it is stated that the poem of Vālmīki was recited by Kuśa and Lava (the *Kuśilavas*?) before the gathering of people to the accompaniment of the 'tantrī'.

The above-noted internal evidence brings out the following three notable facts about the epic: (1) For the composition of his *Kāvya* Vālmīki found available to himself a good deal of material in the earlier tradition, which he freely utilized.³ (2) The character of Vālmīki's

3. vide – H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), p. 52, Baroda, 1960.

composition was not only distinctly different from the compositions so far written but was altogether a novel artistic experiment.⁴ (3) The Rāmāyaṇa was composed and preserved in the oral tradition.

The last point is of utmost interest and significance for us in the present context, for, granting that the professional rhapsodists very faithfully passed on the original composition to the successive generations, there is no denying the truth that the very process of oral transmission of a non-canonical text before listening audiences not only admits, but even demands, a variety of changes. Moreover, as Dr. Vaidya points out, in the tradition in which the Epics grew, emphasis was laid on contents rather than on expression or words. "These expressions or words were capable of being substituted by different expressions provided the meaning remained the same."⁵ Dr. Jacobi is of the view that even after the recording of the Ur-Rāmāyaṇa the tradition of oral transmission continued to operate and there was no stopping of infiltration and transposition in the original text.⁶ There is no wonder therefore that from very early times we find evidence of the existence of various versions of the Rāmāyaṇa which notably differ from one another both in form and matter.

The magnitude of mutual divergences in the various versions of the Rāmāyaṇa has attracted the attention of scholars from the earliest times, and opinions have been expressed about the authenticity of the entire text of the epic or about specific portions thereof. Since authenticity of the text, the source material, is the basic requirement of any research study relating to the Rāmāyaṇa it is necessary to note and examine the view of scholars with regard to the text of the Rāmāyaṇa and to draw guide-lines from them.

For the sake of convenience of treatment we can classify under the following five heads the different views on the text of the Rāmāyaṇa:

4. *Op. cit.* p. 8 and, "... one must admit that the poetry of Rāmāyaṇa was much advanced from the naive popular epic; and we can perceive in it the breaking down of a sublime artificial poetry, which subsequently became invested with a overwhelming beauty. In this sense we can agree with the tradition that it is the *Ādikāvya*." p. 94.

5. The Yuddhakāṇḍa, Cr. Ed., Introduction, p. XXIX, Baroda, 1971.

6. H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), p. 10, Baroda, 1960.

- A. The orthodox view.
- B. The views of the Sanskrit commentators of the Rāmāyaṇa.
- C. The views of the Modern scholars who hold that Books I and VII of the extant Rāmāyaṇa are later additions.
- D. The views of the Editors of the Critical Edition of the Rāmāyaṇa from Baroda.
- E. The view of Dr. J.L. Brockington.

A. *The orthodox view*

The orthodox Hindu believes that Rāma flourished in the *Tretā-Yuga* (approximately 867, 102 B.C.) and that Vālmīki, who was Rāma's contemporary, originally composed a '*Śatakoṭi*' Rāmāyaṇa of which the popular Rāmāyaṇa in 24,000 verses is only a summary. To him, not only the various recensions of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa but all the versions of the *Rāmakathā*, composed down to the Rāmacaritamānasa of the Hindi saint-poet Tulasīdāsa, are equally authoritative, for he looks at them as the utterances of inspired souls (*ārṣa-vacana*) and regards them as just variations of different religious traditions (*sampradāya-bheda*).⁷ Obviously, such an extreme view about the Rāmāyaṇa or the *Rāmakathā* is repugnant to modern research, for it displays total lack of rational or scientific approach.

B. *The views of Sanskrit commentators of the Rāmāyaṇa*

There are more than fifty commentaries on the Rāmāyaṇa out of which about half a dozen are available in print.⁸ These commentaries (ranging between 13th century A.D. to 18th century A.D.) were written after the various recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa had been fixed and were being preserved in a tradition of writing. These commentaries also notice variations in the readings of the text of the Rāmāyaṇa, and their authors often offer their own comments about them. Taking the

7. vide – SVĀMĪ KARAPĀTRĪ, *Rāmāyaṇa Mīmāṃsā*, Chap. 3, Vārāṇasī, (*Samvat*) 2039.

8. G.H. BHATT, *The Bālakāṇḍa*, Cr. Ed., Introduction, p. XXVII, Baroda, 1960.

Tilaka-Ṭikā as an illustration, Dr. Jacobi writes, "There are often mentioned, rejected or justified, such readings which are marked as 'old' *prācīna*, 'traditional' *pāṅkta* or *sāmpradāyika*, 'on the evidence of many MSS.' *bahupustaka-sammata* or as 'not traditional' *apāṅkta* or 'a new conjecture' *ādhunika kalpitaḥ pāṭhaḥ* etc."⁹ These commentators often employ the term '*prakṣipta*' to convey their disapproval or express rejection of a particular reading or portion. However, it is significant to note that the use of this term is confined to individual hemistiches, verses and cantos; no commentator of the Rāmāyaṇa expresses even an inkling of a doubt with regard to the genuineness of any of the seven Kāṇḍas of the Rāmāyaṇa. Obviously, the aim of the commentators was to explain and interpret the Rāmāyaṇa, nevertheless, their commentaries also represent the first effort towards a critical examination of the text of the Rāmāyaṇa. This effort, no doubt, suffers from various limitations within which even the most critical mind was compelled to work in that early period. However, the importance of this effort cannot be underrated, for these commentators even today stand as the pioneers in the field of textual criticism.

C. The views of the Modern Scholars who hold that Books I and VII of the extant Rāmāyaṇa are later additions

In the nineteenth century, when indological studies became popular in the West, the attention of scholars was drawn towards the Rāmāyaṇa. They noticed that the Rāmāyaṇa had been preserved in three recensions – the North-Western, the Eastern and the Southern, respectively termed A, B and C by Dr. Jacobi and Dr. Macdonell. Explaining as to how the original poem of Vālmīki became diversified in various recensions Dr. P.L. Vaidya writes, "... we have the sage Vālmīki for the Rāmāyaṇa as its author. He had only two disciples Lava and Kuśa whom he taught the poem. It is said that they first sang it in the court of Rāma. It must then have been committed to memory by several bards and sung to people in regions far and wide.

9. H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), pp. 8-9, Baroda, 1960.

In the course of this propagation of the *Rāmakathā* or *Rāmāyaṇa*, the bards must have added and even altered the story in a number of ways, in the direction of its wording or even contents. These recitations of bards got localised, and when they were reduced to writing, they assumed the form of recensions and versions current in that particular locality."¹⁰ The divergences among the three recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were found to be of such magnitude that, in the words of Dr. Jacobi, "one third of the verses of one Recension has got not corresponding verses in the others."¹¹

Scholars of the nineteenth century not only noticed mutual divergences among the recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but, on various grounds, also expressed grave doubts with regard to the genuineness of several passages and episodes, within a particular recension. The most significant and bold in this regard is the opinion of Dr. Jacobi who outright declares the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as spurious. According to him the original *Rāmāyaṇa* consisted only of five Books i.e. from *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to *Yuddhakāṇḍa*; the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the *Uttarakāṇḍa* were respectively prefixed and suffixed to it at a later date or dates by one or more persons. Ever since Dr. Jacobi put forth his view it has been tenaciously upheld by Western as well as several oriental scholars. Let us detail the grounds advanced in support of this contention and examine their validity.

(1) It is pointed out that the extant *Rāmāyaṇa* "contains two tables of contents (in cantos i. and iii.) which were certainly made at different times; for one of them takes no notice of the first and last books, and must, therefore, have been made before these were added."¹²

One may recall in this connection that the *Rāmāyaṇa* opens with a conversation between *Vālmīki* and *Nārada*. In the first canto of the *Bālakāṇḍa* the sage *Nārada* recounts, in reply to *Vālmīki*'s query, the virtues of *Rāma* and relates in bare outline those incidents connected with his life which go to prove that he was the ideal man of *Vālmīki*'s conception. Later, at the behest of *Brahmā*, *Vālmīki* worked this ouli-

10. The *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Cr. Ed., Introduction, p. XXX, Baroda, 1971.

11. H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), p. 4, Baroda, 1960.

12. A.A. MACDONELL, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 304, London, 1905.

ne into a Rāmāyaṇa-kāvya. (I 4/6) The Rāmāyaṇa nowhere employs the word 'anukramaṇī' (table of contents); on the other hand, it expressly designates the account of Nārada as the 'Kāvya-bīja', i.e. the seed out of which grew the 'Rāmāyaṇa-Kāvya'.¹³ In the extant Rāmāyaṇa there is only one table of contents in I 3 and it takes full cognizance of the events related throughout, including the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa.

(2) The 'Kāvya-praśasti', occurring at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa, provides the ground for holding the following Uttarakāṇḍa as spurious. Dr. A.A. Macdonell states, "The seventh (book) is undoubtedly a later addition, for the conclusion of the sixth was evidently at one time the end of the whole poem."¹⁴

The confusion about the Uttarakāṇḍa, it may be pointed out, arises by failing to appreciate the character of this last Book. The Uttarakāṇḍa, as its very name suggests, is a supplement appended to the principal work with the object that "The history and greatness of Rāvaṇa required to be detailed some where, for without them the poem would have been incomplete and the greatness of Rāma without a strong relief."¹⁵ The principal theme of the Rāmāyaṇa is the conflict between Rāma and Rāvaṇa,¹⁶ and it comes to a conclusion in the Yuddhakāṇḍa. It is appropriate therefore that the 'Kāvya-praśasti' occurs at the end of the Yuddhakāṇḍa. But the whole poem (including the supplementary material of the last Book) finally comes to a completion in the Uttarakāṇḍa, and it is in fitness of things that the 'Kāvya-praśasti' appears at the end of this Book also.¹⁷

13. The account of Nārada is referred to as 'bīja' or 'kāvyabīja' by a large number of MSS. of the Rāmāyaṇa (vide star passages 151 and 152 of the Bālakāṇḍa, Cr. Ed. Baroda, 1960). Even if the passages are considered spurious the view expressed in them about the character of Nārada's account remains confirmed.

14. A.A. MACDONELL, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 304, London, 1905.

15. C.V. VAIDYA, *Riddle of the Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 48, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. 1906.

16. Vālmiki himself employs 'Paulastyaavadha' as one of the designations of his poem. (vide R I 4/6).

17. The Critical Edition drops both the 'Kāvya-praśastis' as spurious.

The star passage 196 of the Bālakāṇḍa, describing the composition of the Rāmāyaṇa, refers to the Kāṇḍas as "ṣaṭ kāṇḍāni tathottaram". In this expression Kāṇḍas I-VI are treated as one unit and the last Kāṇḍa as a separate, supplementary

(3) It is asserted that the genuine Books of the Rāmāyaṇa (i.e. Books II-VI) evince no acquaintance with the events described in the interpolated Books.¹⁸

Such an allegation has to be rejected outright, for it militates against the evidence of the Rāmāyaṇa. The reconstructed text in the Critical Edition alludes in fair detail to the following incidents from the Bālakāṇḍa:¹⁹

(i) Viśvāmitra approaching king Daśaratha with the request that he should lend him the services of Rāma for guarding his *Yajña* (sacrifice) against the notorious Rākṣasas.

(ii) Rāma staying with Viśvāmitra in the latter's hermitage and driving away the Rākṣasa Mārīca.

(iii) Rāma visiting Mithilā with the sage Viśvāmitra.

(iv) Rāma marrying Sītā, the '*ayonijā*' daughter of king Janaka, in consequence of his fulfilling the condition of stringing Śiva's bow.

Numerous passages from earlier Books are noted in the foot-note below which anticipate the Uttarakāṇḍa, for they refer to incidents that are given in detail only there; in fact, most of these passages can be understood only with the help of the details provided in the Uttarakāṇḍa.²⁰

unit. This character of the Uttarakāṇḍa has been endorsed by Dr. U.P. Shah, the editor of the Seventh Book of the Rāmāyaṇa. He has also upheld Vālmiki's authorship of this Kāṇḍa. (vide – "... the genuine portion of the Uttarakāṇḍa was a subsequent appendix or *Khila* or supplement by the author himself to the main story composed earlier and sung before Rāma and others at the time of the sacrifice." The Uttarakāṇḍa, Cr. Ed., Introduction, p. 52, Baroda, 1975.

18. vide – "Moreover, in the genuine parts of the poem there is never any reference to the events in Book I ...". M. WINTERITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 435-6, Calcutta, 1927.

19. vide R. II 110/23ff. and R. III 36/3ff. (Also R. V 14/15-16).

20. The following passages from Books I-VI require the details provided in the Uttarakāṇḍa:

(i) Construction of Laṅkā by Viśvakarmā – R. IV 57/20, R. V 2/18-20; R. VI 113/3.

(ii) History of the aerial car, Puṣpaka – R. III 30/14; R. III 46/4-6; R. III 53/29; R. V 7/10-11; R. VI 7/3-13; R. VI 86/12; R. VI 109/9.

(iii) Rāvaṇa's lineage – R. I 19/17; R. V 21/6-8.

(iv) Penance and sacrifices of Rāvaṇa for securing boons – R. III 30/17.

(v) Boons of Rāvaṇa – R. I 14/6-14; R. I 19/16; R. III 30/18; R. V 49/24-6; R. VI 31/53; R. VI 47/53; R. VI 48/6-7; R. VI 82/29; R. VI 98/14.

(4) Sometimes it is pointed out that there are references in the genuine Books which expressly contradict the events mentioned in Book I. It is to be noted that from the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa only two such contradictions are repeatedly cited, namely,

(i) Rāma, in the Arāṇyakāṇḍa, calls Lakṣmaṇa as 'akṛtadāra' (a bachelor) even though his marriage with Urmilā has been described in the Bālakāṇḍa;²¹

(ii) Bharata, who was, according to the Bālakāṇḍa, carried by his maternal uncle to Kekaya after his marriage, is referred to as a *bāla* (child) by Mantharā in the Ayodhyākāṇḍa.²²

Such contradictions do not establish different authorships, for, as Dr. C.M. Bowra points out,²³ minor contradictions are implied in the conditions of oral performance. Moreover, the cases cited above, in fact, do not illustrate any contradiction at all in the Rāmāyaṇa. The words of Rāma spoken to Śūrpaṇakhā in the Arāṇyakāṇḍa, one has to

(vi) Rāvaṇa's marriage with Mandodarī - R. VI 7/6.

(vii) Rāvaṇa's seizure of divine damsels - R. V 7/65.

(viii) Rāvaṇa's adventures - R. III 30/7,15; R. III 30/10,13; R. V 18/20; R. V 20/10; R. V 44/7-8; R. V 50/18; R. VI 28/20; R. VI 47/129.

(ix) Meghanādā's victory over Indra - R. V 46/2; R. VI 35/22.

(x) Curse for Kumbhakarṇa - R. VI 48/9.

(xi) Abduction of Kumbhīnasī - R. VI 7/7.

(xii) History of Hanūmān - (His birth) R. IV 65/8-9; R. V 33/73-5; R. VI 19/11.

(His leap towards the rising sun) R. IV 65/19; R. VI 19/13.

(He being hit by Indra's bolt) R. IV 65/21.

(Significance of his name) R. IV 65/22.

(Boons to H.) R. IV 65/24-7; R. V 46/33,38.

21. vide - "... in fact there are details in this book which directly contradict the statements of later books." M. WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 436, Calcutta, 1927.

22. vide - H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), pp. 42, 43; Baroda, 1960.

23. vide - "The conditions of oral performance may mean that sooner or later a poet contradicts himself or muddles something in his narrative. There are few heroic poems in which some such contradiction cannot be found. The poet so concentrates on his immediate task that he may not remember all that has gone before or foresee all that will come later. The chances are that any such slip will be of little importance, since, if the poet does not notice it, it is not likely that his audience will notice it either. But when his poem is written down and subjected to the sharp eyes of critical scholars, what was originally a trivial slip may be regarded as a grave error and made a foundation for bold theories of multiple authorship."

- C.M. BOWRA, *Heroic Poetry*, pp. 299-300, London, 1952.

note, were not meant to be taken seriously. It is very clearly stated in the Rāmāyaṇa that Rāma was only jesting with Śūrpaṇakhā.²⁴ Likewise, the words of the elderly maid-servant Mantharā are only expressive of her almost motherly affection for Bharata and cannot be interpreted as rigidly indicative of Bharata's age.

(5) A significant change in the religion and mythology of Books I and VII from the rest of the Books leads these scholars to distinguish between their authorship. Thus Dr. M. Winternitz points out, "Only in Books I and VII is Rāma throughout conceived as a divine being, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In Books II to VI, apart from a few passages which are doubtless interpolated, he is always only a mortal hero, and in all indisputably genuine parts of the epic there is no indication whatever of his being conceived as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Where mythology enters into the genuine parts of the poem, it is not Viṣṇu, but the god Indra who, as in the Veda, is regarded as the highest god."²⁵

It is to be pointed out that Dr. Winternitz's observation about the position of Indra finds no substantiation in the Rāmāyaṇa. Indra had been pushed into the background already in the later Śruti period. No doubt, he retains the title '*devarāja*' down to the present day his position in the post-Vedic period is very much subservient to the members of the Trinity. In the Rāmāyaṇic mythology super-eminent position is enjoyed by two gods – Brahmā and Viṣṇu. Brahmā, in the Rāmāyaṇa, is the conceiver and Viṣṇu the executor of plans for the welfare of all gods (especially Indra) who, without them, would have been nowhere in their conflict with the Rākṣasas.²⁶

For Western scholars Rāma of the Rāmāyaṇa is a very complex character and naturally, therefore, they express divergent views about him. Dr. Jacobi, for instance, finds Rāma represented as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in Books I and VII, whereas in the rest of the Books he is a human being. But the learned scholar seems to have remained

24. Vide – Krūairanāryaiḥ saumitre *parihāsaḥ* kathaṃcana, na kāryaḥ ... R. III 17/19.

25. M. WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 436, Calcutta, 1927.

26. For details vide the author's *A Socio-Political Study of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 193-6, Delhi, 1971.

unsatisfied with the latter part of his observation, for he suggested further on a division between Book II on the one hand and Books III-VI on the other. He states, "everything is human and natural"²⁷ in Book II but in Books III-VI "everything is supernatural and phantastic."²⁸ Dr. Jacobi would like us to believe that Rāma in Book II is a human being; in Books III-VI he is Indra, who with the help of Hanūmān, the genius of the monsoon, recovers his wife Sītā, the Furrow, from the captivity of Vṛtra, the king of Rākṣasas; and in Books I and VII he is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Earlier, Dr. Jacobi perceived three slightly different layers in the development of Vālmiki's Rāma. He stated, "Through this very work the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa became converted to the ethical hero of the people and from the hero of a clan to a national hero. The honour apportioned to him, raised him forthwith from the human to the divine sphere and brought about his identification with Viṣṇu ..."²⁹ But, it should be remembered that such an idealization of the 'real' is a natural and well-known feature of Indian poetry. Even recent rulers like Pṛthvīrāja II³⁰ and Pṛthvīrāja III³¹ were regarded as incarnations of Rāma. About Samudragupta it was said that only in routine functioning was he a mortal; else, he was a god incarnate.³²

Vālmiki's portrayal of Rāma creates a serious difficulty for the Westerners and for those others who view things wholly Indian with a Western eye. Vālmiki has indeed portrayed Rāma as a human being but he is at the same time so conscious of the divine element in him that he conveys through numerous passages scattered all through the seven Kāṇḍas of the Rāmāyaṇa the fact of his being essentially divine and an incarnation of Viṣṇu.³³

27. H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), p. 95, Baroda, 1960.

28. *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

29. *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

N.B. Dr. Bulcke has totally rejected the views of Dr. Jacobi. vide *Rāmakathā*, pp. 103-5, Prayāga, 1971.

30. vide — the Hānsi Inscription of Pṛthvīrāja II's reign, E.I., Vol. I.

31. vide — Jayānaka's Pṛthvīrāja Vijayam, Canto XI.

32. vide — Samudragupta's Allahabad Pillar Inscription (Line 28), C.I.I., Vol. III.

33. In R. I 1/2-5 Vālmiki's enquiry is with regard to a human being (maharṣe tvam samartho(a)si jñātum evaṃ vidhaṃ naram) and in Nārada's reply too, the reference is to a human being (tairyuktaḥ śrūyatām naraḥ, R. I 1/7). However, Vālmiki

(6) Language and style are also sometimes made the basis for drawing distinction between Books II-VI on the one hand and Books I and VII on the other. Thus Dr. M. Winternitz remarks, "... but the language and style, too, stand out as inferior to those of Books II to VII."³⁴ He is even of the view that taking advantage of the popularity of the heroic songs, the *brāhmaṇas* deliberately took possession of the epic poetry and for the propagation of their own religious ideas "compounded this poetry which was essentially and purely secular in origin, with their own religious poems and the whole stock-in-trade of their theological and priestly knowledge."³⁵

Such views are not tenable, for they go against the findings of those who have subjected the Rāmāyaṇa to a close and thorough scrutiny. To wit, Dr. Jacobi writes, "In fact these (two Books) do not at all differ from the remaining (Books) so far as the metrical peculiarities are concerned. The (metre) *Śloka*, which shows the same regular features, has been utilised in them and been handled with the same dexterity."³⁶ About the grammatical irregularities he says, "But they are pretty uniform all over the poem; as a result there is no means of making this feature as a test of distinguishing the spurious element from the genuine."³⁷ Further, with regard to the spirit of these two Books he observes, "We can speak of biased revision, only when the existent material is remodelled in order to incorporate into it views and dispositions, which differ from those of the old work or are, perhaps, in glaring contrast to them. Nothing of this sort can be traced in the Rāmāyaṇa because the annexed matters breathe the same spirit as the original poem."³⁸ This last observation of Dr. Jacobi is corroborated by Dr. A.A. Macdonell also, who writes, "They (the two Books)

recognizes Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The poet has expressly made his approach about Rāma clear in R. VI 105/10 – *Ātmānaṃ mānuṣaṃ manye rāmaṃ daśarathāt-majam*.

34. M. WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part. II, p. 435, Calcutta, 1927.

35. M. WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 279, Calcutta, 1927.

36. H. JACOBI, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N.), p. 21, Baroda, 1960.

37. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

38. *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

are, however, pervaded by the same spirit as the older part. There is, therefore, no reason for the supposition that they are due to a Brāhmaṇa revision intended to transform a poem originally meant for the warrior caste."³⁹

We would further like to submit in this connection that even if there were within any 'Kāvya' variations of language and style, these would not in themselves serve to establish multiplicity of authorship, for in a literary composition language and style do have a rhythm of their own which fluctuates with the subject-matter, characters, circumstance and context. As an illustration from the Rāmāyaṇa itself, one may note that in the Sundarakāṇḍa the language of dialogues, of nature-descriptions, of the accounts of the affluence and splendour of the Rākṣasas and of battle-scenes is not the same throughout.

It may not be impertinent here to note the evidence contained in the sister epic, Mahābhārata, and see what bearing it has on the present question. It is well-known that in addition to making sporadic references to the work Rāmāyaṇa, its characters and author Vālmīki, the Mahābhārata quotes *ad verbatim* a hemistich of the Yuddhakāṇḍa.⁴⁰ Besides, it provides a summary of the Rāmakathā at four places: (i) In the Rāmopākhyāna of Āraṇyakaparva; (ii) in the Bhīma-Hanūmān dialogue of Āraṇyakaparva; (iii) in the Śoḍaśarājopākhyāna of Droṇaparva (Appendix I No. 8) and (iv) in the Śoḍaśarājopākhyāna of Śāntiparva. The account in the Rāmopākhyāna is very elaborate as compared to the rest, which contain only sixteen, approximately twenty-two and nine verses respectively. Since the purpose of the Rāmopākhyāna was to console Yudhiṣṭhira by illustrating how people fallen in misfortune do, later, gain happiness, the account closes after Rāma's coronation. Nevertheless, by making reference to the incarnation of Viṣṇu as the sons of Daśaratha in pursuance of the request of the gods and to the

39. A. A. MACDONELL, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 304, London, 1905.

40. (Na hantavyāḥ striyaśceti yad braviṣi plavaṅgama) Piḍākaram amitṛāṇām yatsyāt kartavyameva tat. R. VI 68/27.

cf. - (Api cāyaṃ purā gītaḥ śloko vālmīkinā bhuvi)

Piḍākaram amitṛāṇām yatsyāt kartavyam eva tat.

Mahābhārata VII 118/48.

past history of the Rākṣasas, it unambiguously displays its acquaintance with the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa respectively.⁴¹ The rest of the accounts also, despite their shortness, interestingly enough, furnish clear evidence of their familiarity with the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa. The Bhīma-Hanūmān dialogue makes a reference to the prayer of Hanūmān made to Rāma, to the effect that he should continue to live on earth till the tradition of the *Rāmakathā* persists among the people;⁴² the Śodaśarājopākhyāna of Śāntiparva says that Rāma ruled for eleven thousand years,⁴³ and the account in the Appendix of Droṇaparva⁴⁴ refers to the eight-fold division of the kingdom by Rāma among his sons and nephews. In view of this evidence, one cannot uphold the remarks of Dr. Bulcke that these portions of the Mahābhārata display no familiarity with Rāma's divinity and with the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa.⁴⁵ The fact on the other hand is that the redactors of the Mahābhārata were fully acquainted with the same form of the Rāmāyaṇa as one finds it today preserved in the traditional seven Kāṇḍas.

41. Note: Tadarthamavatīrṇo(a)sau manniyogāccaturbhujah,
Viṣṇuḥ praharatām śreṣṭhaḥ sa karmaitat kariṣyati.

Mahābhārata (III 260/5). For the account of the Rākṣasas see *Mahābhārata*, III 259/1 ff.

42. Yāvadrāmakathā vīra bhavellōkeṣu śatruhan,
Tāvajjīveyamityevaṃ tathāstviti ca so(a)bravīt.
(*Mahābhārata*, III 147/37)

cf. Yāvadrāmakathām vīra śroṣye(a)haṃ prthivītale,
Tāvacccharīre vatsyantu mama prāṇā na saṃśayaḥ. R. VII 39/16.

43. Daśavarṣasahasrāṇi daśavarṣa śatāni ca,
Rājyaṃ kārītavān rāmastatastu tridivaṃ gataḥ.
(*Mahābhārata* III 147/38) and Daśavarṣasahasrāṇi rāmo
rājyaṃ akārayat (*Mahābhārata* XII 29/54)

cf. Daśavarṣasahasrāṇi daśavarṣaśatāni ca,
Rāmo rājyamupāsitvā brahmalokaṃ gamiṣyati. (R. I 1/76)
and Daśavarṣasahasrāṇi daśavarṣa śatāni ca
Kṛtvā vāsasya niyatim ... (R. VII 94/12).

44. *Mahābhārata*, VII Appendix I No. 8,480.

cf. – R. VII 91/9, 92/5-9, 97/17-8; 98/9-10.

45. C. BULCKE, *Rāmakathā*, pp. 48-9, Prayāga, 1971.

D. *The views of the Editors of the Critical Edition*

The critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* brought out by the Oriental Institute, Baroda, between 1960 and 1975 A.D. is a direct effort to fulfil a need highlighted by Dr. Jacobi, and naturally, it has been substantially guided by his work, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (translated into English as *The Rāmāyaṇa* by Dr. S.N. Ghosal). The work of critically editing the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been carried out by a team of experts comprising, besides a Board of Referees, a Board of Editors consisting of Dr. G.H. Bhatt, Dr. P.L. Vaidya, P.C. Divanji, D.R. Mankad, G.C. Jhala and Dr. U.P. Shah who individually supervised the editing of the different *Kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The team collected about a hundred MSS. of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which are representatives of different parts of the country, different periods of time and different scripts.⁴⁶ For bringing out the critical text of each *Kāṇḍa* the different editors have picked up "on the basis of antiquity, purity and completeness"⁴⁷ a number of MSS. varying from 29 to 41. The oldest MS. which has been utilized for all the *Kāṇḍas* is No. 934 of Bir Library, Kathmandu, Nepal (of which the microfilm has been procured by the Institute) and is dated *Samvat* 1076 (i.e. C.A.D. 1020).⁴⁸ In addition to the MSS. of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the editors have also consulted the commentaries of *Rāmānuja*, *Maheśvaratīrtha*, *Govindarāja*, *Kataka* and *Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa*, all of which belong to the South and range between approximately 1250 A.D. to 1700 A.D.⁴⁹ Indirect help has also been derived from epitomes like the *Rāmopākhyāna* (of *Āraṇyakaparva*, *Mahābhārata*), the *Purāṇas* and the *Rāmāyaṇa Mañjarī*. These, as Dr. P.L. Vaidya states, have been utilized "to corroborate the correspondence of incidents only and not for the wording of the critical text."⁵⁰ The various versions of the *Rāmakathā* contained in *Jaina* and *Buddhist* traditions

46. vide – *The Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. VII and *The Kiśkindhākāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. IX, Baroda, 1962, 1965.

47. *The Bālakāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XXIX, Baroda, 1960.

48. *Op. cit.*, p. XIII.

49. *The Kiśkindhākāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. IX, Baroda, 1965.

50. *The Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XXVIII, Baroda, 1971.

have been ignored, for, as Dr. G.H. Bhatt remarks, they "have an altogether different setting with a special purpose and are, therefore, of little help."⁵¹

On the collation of different MSS. the Editors have arrived at the unanimous conclusion that there are only two Recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Northern and the Southern. Although these Recensions "widely differ from one another they have preserved in an appreciable manner a common text of the Rāmāyaṇa – a feature which compels us to accept a common source for both of them, the Ur-Rāmāyaṇa."⁵² It is common knowledge that the Rāmāyaṇa originated from Vālmiki in the North. "The text of the Rāmāyaṇa descended like the Ganges, from the North to the South, maintaining the same form in the initial stage. South India accepted the Epic as a sacred text from very early times and produced a host of commentators who helped the preservation of the original form of the text during a long period."⁵³ No doubt, additions and alterations have been made to the original text both in North and South, however, the Editors of the critical edition have endorsed the view of Dr. Jacobi that the Southern Recension "has generally preserved the text of the Rāmāyaṇa in an original or older form, while N (Northern Recension) has polished the text both from the view-point of form and matter ... The whole atmosphere of North India was in fact surcharged with Sanskrit scholarship. The people consequently tried to maintain most scrupulously the purity of the Sanskrit Language of the Rāmāyaṇa which was considered as the *Ādikāvya*. As a result of this psychology the original text of the Rāmāyaṇa with all its peculiarities, although held sacred, was silently revised so as to bring it up to the formal standard of a Kāvya."⁵⁴ These two Recensions are further sub-divided into various versions – the Northern Recension having three versions, namely, North-eastern, North-western and Western which maintain special peculiarities of their own, while the Southern Recension is represen-

51. The Bālakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. XXIX, Baroda, 1960.

52. *Op. cit.*, p. XXX.

53. The Aranyakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. XXVIII, Baroda, 1963.

54. The Bālakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. XXXII, Baroda, 1960.

ted in the three versions – Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam – which have no doubt preserved an almost uniform text ...”⁵⁵.

The Editor of the Bālakāṇḍa (who was also the first General Editor of this project), Dr. G.H. Bhatt, took no pains to examine the view of Dr. Jacobi and other scholars with regard to the spuriousness of the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa. In a very casual way he started with the remark, “It has been generally admitted that the original Rāmāyaṇa consisted of the 5 Kāṇḍas (II-VI) only and that the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa were added later on”⁵⁶ and soon rounded up the question saying, “But all these problems, as they fall within the sphere of Higher Criticism, are not relevant as we do not want to go for the present beyond the evidence of MSS.”⁵⁷ Among the subsequent editors, Dr. U.P. Shah (writing the Preface of the Yuddhakāṇḍa, as General Editor) referred to the colophon of a Palm-leaf Ms. No. L652 of Kerala University Library and to Gorresio’s edition of the Yuddhakāṇḍa and remarked, “Thus there was a tradition that Rāmāyaṇa ended with Yuddhakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa was a supplement.”⁵⁸ Later, as editor of the Uttarakāṇḍa, he explicitly declared, “... What we can however say is that all the portions of Uttarakāṇḍa do not form a homogeneous unit with other kāṇḍas, that several portions, from Uttara, Sargas 1 to 42 were gradually added, but that the genuine portion of the Uttarakāṇḍa was a subsequent appendix or *Khila* or supplement by the author himself to the main story composed earlier and sung before Rāma and others at the time of the sacrifice.”⁵⁹

It is necessary to draw the attention of the scholars to the aim and achievement of the editors of the Critical Edition. In the words of Dr. Bhatt, “The text of the Epic has to be reconstructed solely on the evidence of MSS. without bringing in the question of Higher criticism at this stage. The Higher criticism which is no doubt most important and interesting can be better applied to the critical text prepared with the

55. *Op. cit.*, p. XXX.

56. *Op. cit.*, p. XXXI.

57. *Ibid.*, p. XXXI, Baroda, 1960.

58. The Yuddhakāṇḍa, Preface, pp. VII-VIII, Baroda, 1971.

59. The Uttarakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. 52, Baroda, 1975.

help of the MSS. only.”⁶⁰ It must be stated to the credit of the entire team of editors that they have very rigidly adhered to this aim in preparing the text of their edition. To wit, Dr. Bhatt brought out the *Bālakāṇḍa* despite the fact that he subscribed to the view that the original *Rāmāyaṇa* consisted of five *Kāṇḍas* only, and Prof. G.C. Jhala, the editor of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* retained the *Surāṣā* episode in Book V, even though he felt strongly convinced that the episode “did not form part of the original text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and therefore is a later addition.”⁶¹

As regards the achievement of this tremendous effort the following words of Dr. Vaidya are noteworthy: “The main principle on which the constitution of our critical text is based is that there should be a full agreement in substance between all recensions and versions ... This has one good result, namely, that we are enabled to maintain the purity of a recension instead of creating a new recension ... Our constituted Text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a pure text of the *Ur-Rāmāyaṇa* supported by the Southern group of MSS. from which all unauthorised additions are expunged, for we believe, and we can prove by evidence, that this group alone has kept up the archaic characteristics of the *Ur-Rāmāyaṇa* of *Vālmiki* as far as existing MSS. can take us.”⁶² A similar view, but in a more categorical way, has been expressed by Prof. D.R. Mankad in the following words: “Let us now see if there are any stages traceable of the growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa* text in the North. (1) The First stage evidently is the text which was composed by the *ādikavi*. It must have been a text quite brief and probably without embellishments – the *Ur-Rāmāyaṇa*. No Ms. preserving this text is available today. ... (2) Then the text must have gone on expanding i.e. the Second stage is the stage of expansion. Through the course of centuries, several additions must have been made to the text of the *ādikavi*, till we come to the time when it was transmitted to the South. During the course of these centuries the text was considerably inflated ... But these additions were all completed by the time the text was transmitted to the south i.e. the time of our constituted text.”⁶³

60. The *Bālakāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XXXIV, Baroda, 1960.

61. The *Sundarakāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XXXIII, Baroda, 1966.

62. The *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XX, Baroda, 1962.

63. The *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Introduction, p. XXV, Baroda, 1965.

The limitations of these claims are, however, very apparent. In the first instance, it has to be noted that the oldest MS. in possession of the team belongs to 1020 A.D. and the period of the commentators from South falls even subsequent to it. The gap between the composition of the Rāmāyaṇa by Vālmīki and the source-material relied upon by the editors is obviously very wide – approximately fifteen centuries. Secondly, the words of Dr. Vaidya, namely, "In fact, it is well nigh impossible to come across a MS. of the Rāmāyaṇa older than 1020 A.D."⁶⁴ may be expressive of the most sincere efforts of the team to collect all available evidence, however, one can not completely rule out the future possibilities. It is significant to recall in this context the fact that subsequent to the starting of the work new MSS. of the Rāmāyaṇa came to light and it was found that they contained valuable material for the reconstruction of the text. The editor of the Uttarakāṇḍa candidly states, "We had originally selected and collated only M₁, M₂ and M₃ for this Kāṇḍa. But after editing the text of the first ten to fifteen *sargas*, it became more and more obvious that our evidence of T, G and M manuscripts so far collected and collated for this Kāṇḍa was not sufficient. Since we could easily explore and select some M manuscripts ... our task became easier and we could definitely observe an older S text, at least so far as the M version was concerned. The present editor believes that similar evidence can be available for the Kāṇḍas previously published by us ... Whenever a second edition of this Critical Edition of the Rāmāyaṇa may be undertaken, it is hoped that further evidence for Kāṇḍas I-VI will be collected and utilized from G and M versions."⁶⁵ He further adds, "... Very probably M₄, M₈, M₉₋₁₀ represent a text tradition which is at least as old as the age of Udāri Varadarāja. This tradition, as will be seen from the Critical Apparatus of the Uttarakāṇḍa, differs from the text tradition of our vulgate, of the Kumbhahonam edition and of the Southern commentaries of Kataka, Govindarāja and others. Therefore for Kāṇḍas I-VI a future research for G and M manuscripts representing

64. The Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Introduction, p. VII, Baroda, 1962.

65. The Uttarakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. 5, Baroda, 1975.

the older S traditions would be advisable.”⁶⁶ Lastly, the editors have unanimously accepted the Southern Recension as vulgate,⁶⁷ principally on the ground that it has “preserved the older form of the Epic”;⁶⁸ the Northern Recension has been utilized by them as a check for detecting and removing additional matter which somehow found its way into the SR.⁶⁹ Now, granted that the language of the NR has been polished in later centuries, this does not necessarily imply that its contents have also become less trustworthy. On the other hand, as pointed out by Dr. Bhatt, the Rāmāyaṇa came to be recognized as a religious text, a Vaiṣṇava treatise by the Vaiṣṇava Alvars in the early centuries of the Christian era,⁷⁰ therefore, the possibility of the remodelling of the contents of the SR under that influence are the more likely. Our investigations, for example, indicate that a good deal of valuable information with regard to the Rākṣasas has been consciously dropped in the SR.⁷¹

E. The View of Dr. J.L. Brockington

Dr. Brockington has laboured hard to discover five stages in the evolution of the extant Rāmāyaṇa. He is of the view that the Rāmāyaṇa has passed through the following five stages of growth in assuming the present form.⁷²

Stage I: To this stage belongs the original poem orally transmitted from about the fifth to the fourth century B.C. comprising all śloka stanzas of Books II-VI not listed below (in the following four stages). This core or kernel constitutes 37.10 percent of the text.⁷³

66. *Op. cit.*, p. 6, Baroda, 1975.

67. The Bālakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. XXXII, Baroda, 1960.

68. The Aranyakāṇḍa, Introduction, p. XXVII, Baroda, 1963.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Op. cit.*, p. XXVI.

71. For details vide the author's *A Socio-Political Study of the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 274-7 and 340-6, Delhi, 1971.

72. J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, Appendix, p. 329, Delhi, 1984.

73. For determining the five stages, Dr. Brockington has taken into consideration the entire text of the Rāmāyaṇa, i.e., the constituted text of the Critical Edition, together with the star passages and the passages in the Appendices. However, when he indicates the percentage in the different stages he has in view only the constituted text.

Stage 2: In this stage the bards who recited the original poem from memory, responding to the expectations of their audience, felt the need to embellish and complete the original story with the insertion of episodes, descriptive digressions, praise of local deities and sacred places, and with geographical descriptions. Thus approximately between the third century B.C. to first century A.D. the original form of the poem (consisting of Books II-VI only) swelled to become almost its double with the addition of 34.05 percent of the text in *Śloka* metre plus 4.27 percent of the text in all longer metres. Dr. Brockington gives the following Kāṇḍa-wise detail of accretions in this stage:

Ayodhyākāṇḍa – *Sargas* 1-30; 46-7; 57-8; 61; 65-9; 74; 85; 88-9; 94-5; 98; 100-2; 106-8; 110-11.

Aranyakāṇḍa – *Sargas* 1-4; 8-11; 13; 15; 25; 28-30; 33; 40; 44-5; 50; 53; 58; 60; 71.

Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa – *Sargas* 13; 17-18; 21; 23-4; 27-30; 39-42; 49; 59-61; 65-6.

Sundarakāṇḍa – *Sargas* 1-8; 12-17; 26-7; 33-7; 43; 45-7; 54-8.

Yuddhakāṇḍa – *Sargas* 4-5; 23-4; 30-1; 46-8; 53; 55; 57-63; 70-3; 79-82; 87; 90-1; 102-7; 111-16.

Stage 3:

In this stage the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa incorporating a number of virtually independent episodes, markedly *purāṇic* in character, were respectively prefixed and suffixed to the existing poem. Since the character of these two Books is distinctly identical, Dr. Brockington places them together in the third stage even though he is convinced that they “undoubtedly reached their present form over a considerable period of time”⁷⁴ and hence are products of multiple authorship. This growth took place between the first and the third century A.D. and in bulk constitutes 24.57 percent of the text.

Stages 4 and 5:

In these two stages, roughly spreading over the fourth to twelfth centuries A.D., the period of divergence into recensions, were added all the supplementary verses recorded as star passages or Appendices

74. J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, p. 59, Delhi, 1984.

in the Critical Edition from Baroda. Among these, such passages as are having good manuscript support are placed under stage 4, while those with poor manuscript support are assigned to stage 5.

Dr. Brockington's research is evidently based on and guided by the Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from Baroda and is virtually a reaffirmation of the evolution of the epic implied therein, with one significant innovation, namely, the splitting of Books II-VI also in two stages. But at the same time the learned author candidly accepts "that the original poem would have included not only the material of the first stage but also that underlying the expansions (as opposed to insertions) of the second stage."⁷⁵ In effect, Dr. Brockington notices three phases in this second stage, namely, (1) "an amplification of the literary aspects of the narrative, the inclusion of elements of *Svabhāvokti* in descriptions, and the insertion of extraneous episodes and proverbial matter";⁷⁶ (ii) "the incorporation of didactic and moralistic material often similar to that in the *Mahābhārata*, and often prompted by the desire to justify the heroes in those episodes where they do not conform to later ethical standards",⁷⁷ and (iii) all verses in longer metres whether occurring at the end of a *sarga* or within a *sarga*.⁷⁸

It is necessary to point out that Dr. Brockington suffers from a few basic misconceptions which have led him to view the bulk of the original poem as later modifications or interpolations. He unfortunately confuses the *Ādikāvya* of *Vālmīki* with its source, namely, the bardic songs and ballads, with the result that all elements of poetic grace in the epic appear to him to be incongruent patches appended by later interpolators. Theoretically he recognizes the homogeneity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but the way he dissects the text into stages and phases reduces it into an incoherent narrative devoid of any artistic excellence.⁷⁹ The *Rāmāyaṇa*, it has to be plainly understood, was not supplied by later interpolators with material

75. *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Op. cit.*, p. 50. In fact, Dr. Brockington notices three stages even in verses in longer metres – vide p. 53.

79. Dr. Jacobi, who considered the *Bālākāṇḍa* as a later composition, recognized the beginning of the original poem in the 5th canto of this *Kāṇḍa*. (*Das*

and form, as Dr. Brockington holds,⁸⁰ to correspond to the standards of a *Mahākāvya*, but in fact, it served as a model for the later rhetoricians to evolve their definitions of a *Mahākāvya*. One has to remember in this connection that the '*lakṣaṇa-granthas*' invariably presuppose '*lakṣya-granthas*' and are based on them.

An equally fallacious view of Dr. Brockington is that the original poem of Vālmīki was adapted by later redactors for the propagation of *brāhmaṇa* values.⁸¹ Such an allegation was categorially denied by Dr. Jacobi and Macdonell⁸² and speaks of a total ignorance of the cultural traditions of ancient India. In those times, *Dharma*, comprising not only the ideals of piety and righteousness – *sādhāraṇa dharma* – but also standards of behaviour laid down with reference to the *Varṇa* and *Āśrama* institutions – *viśeṣa dharma* – was the guiding force for all individuals in the society. To uphold *Dharma* was the primary duty of a ruler, and the glory of Vālmīki's hero, Rāma, celebrated down to the present day in popular imagination as '*maryādā-puruṣottama*', primarily rests on the fact that he strictly adhered to the code of *Dharma* as recognized in his times.⁸³

Rāmāyaṇa, Eng. Transl. Ghosal, S.N. pp. 43-4). Dr. Brockington considers such attempts as altogether unnecessary. If his suggestions on the evolution of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are accepted, the original poem would start with the verse, "Sa rāmapreṣitah kṣipraṃ saṃtāpakaluṣendriyaḥ, Praviśya nṛpatiṃ sūto niḥśvasantam dadarśa ha (R. II 31/1)". He feels not the least worried about the abruptness of such a beginning, for, according to him, "... There is ample dramatic justification for being plunged in *medias res*, especially in the case of a well-known story such as this presumably was when Vālmīki gave it its distinctive form."

(J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, p. 55).

80. Cf. "... the *Rāmāyaṇa* was transformed from a heroic to a literary epic with the primary emphasis on the emotional and lyric aspects, becoming - as Indian tradition insists - the precursor of the artificial, literary epic as the *ādikāvya*". J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, p. 49, Delhi, 1984.

81. Cf. (i) "With the increasing religious significance of the work comes also its increasing adaptation to *brāhmaṇa* values." (p. 15).

(ii) "From the second stage onwards, reflecting the gradual penetration of the epic by *brāhmaṇa* standards ..." (p. 183).

(iii) "... an incident foreign to the spirit of the earlier parts of the story, and introduced as part of the brahmanisation of the work." (p. 223).

J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, Delhi, 1984.

82. vide – p. 11 supra.

83. For details vide, the author's *A Socio-Political Study of the Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 434-46, Delhi, 1971.

Dr. Brockington's difficulty with the text of the Rāmāyaṇa is further increased when, despite the fact that he recognizes Ḡḍhras, Vānaras and Rākṣasas as different non-Aryan tribes of South India of Rāmāyaṇa age, leading their lives at different levels of civilization, he indiscriminately confuses the conditions of one people with those of the others (while examining their social, political and religious conditions) and in the attempt discovers mutual inconsistencies and disagreements.

Finally, it may not be impertinent to observe that Dr. Brockington has not been able to point out any characteristics of language or style which are exclusively applicable to any particular stage conceived by him. Having himself drawn compartments in the text of the Rāmāyaṇa, when he compares one with the other, he is naturally able to discover mutual variations in the frequency of occurrences of forms and usages.⁸⁴ Such flimsy evidence cannot serve as a sound basis for building an ingenuous theory about the evolution of the Rāmāyaṇa, especially when it is totally against the time-honoured tradition of India supported by the evidence of the available manuscripts.

The discussion in the foregoing pages shows that despite the very best efforts of a galaxy of Indian and foreign scholars the question of the text of the Rāmāyaṇa still remains inconclusive. Naturally, the question will be taken up again and fresh attempts will be made to solve the insoluble. It will not be too immodest to make a few submissions here for the consideration of future researchers in this field.

It is indeed true that there are no distinct compositions in Sanskrit which may strictly be classed under Heroic Poetry, however, there is little doubt that the Rāmāyaṇa possesses in large numbers the basic characteristics belonging to this class of poetry. But this is not an indication of any conscious attempt to transform the original heroic poem into a literary epic, as modern scholars are inclined to interpret; rather,

84. Vide, for example, his observation on the occurrence of the words 'ratha' and 'syandana' or 'aśva' and 'haya' (J.L. BROCKINGTON, *Righteous Rāma*, p. 138, Delhi, 1984). He seems to rejoice in working out futile statistics – cf. "Desiderative and intensive forms occur more commonly in these verses: for example, seven of the forty-nine desiderative forms in the Ayodhyākāṇḍa are found in tag verses (that is, a seventh of all desideratives is found in a twenty-second part of the whole) and in both the Ayodhyā and Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍas one of the two intensive forms found occurs in a tag verse." (*op. cit.*, p. 52).

this is only a vindication of the fact that the Rāmāyaṇa originated under the same conditions which give a special character and shape to Heroic Poetry. Misconceptions in this regard mostly arise because scholars fail to appreciate that along with the elements of Heroic poetry two more very important factors have gone into the creation of the Rāmāyaṇa, namely, the literary traditions of the times and the genius of Vālmīki.

Like all Heroic Poetry the Rāmāyaṇa is anthropocentric. As in Heroic Poems of peoples pursuing polytheistic religion,⁸⁵ in the Rāmāyaṇa too, gods are introduced in the action of the poem, but they are neither central figures nor centres of interest. The central figure of the Rāmāyaṇa is Rāma, its hero. And he, as revealed from the Vālmīki-Nārada-*Samvāda*, is basically a man and an example of pre-eminent manhood. He commands admiration primarily because he has in rich abundance qualities which other men have to a less extent. C.M. Bowra points out that greatest heroes of Heroic Poetry are thought to be so wonderful that they cannot be wholly human but must have something divine about them.⁸⁶ There is nothing strange, therefore, if, keeping with the traditions of his times, Vālmīki identified his hero with Viṣṇu, the embodiment of grandeur and martial excellence in post-Ṛgvedic period.⁸⁷

What is significant to note is that, despite this identification, Vālmīki attributes no divine or supernatural powers to his hero. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma conducts himself throughout his career strictly in accordance with his specifically human virtues. Thus, there is no sound base for suspecting, much less rejecting, those passages or portions of the Rāmāyaṇa which refer to Rāma's identification with Viṣṇu.

The theme of a heroic poem relates to an age which believes in the pursuit of honour through action and adventure.⁸⁸ Such adventurous

85. C.M. BOWRA, *Heroic Poetry*, p. 87, London, 1952.

86. *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

87. Such an identification should not be confused with later Vaiṣṇavism characterized by the concepts of *Daśavatāra*, *Prapatti* or *Śaraṇāgati*, *Navadhābhakti* and so on – concepts totally absent in the Rāmāyaṇa. Moreover, it is a self-evident truth that in the Rāmāyaṇa there are no traces of even that earliest form of Vaiṣṇavism which one finds in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata and the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā.

88. C.M. BOWRA, *Heroic Poetry*, p. 1, London, 1952.

events, specially when they are of national importance, are generally preserved in tradition, and, not infrequently, poets commemorate them through their poems. The Rāmāyaṇa undeniably centres around such an event. In the form of the Rāma-Rāvaṇa-Yuddha it speaks of the vehement struggle that the Aryans of ancient India had to undertake to resist and subdue an advanced but antagonistic Rākṣasa culture. No doubt, like all Heroic Poetry, the Rāmāyaṇa too claims to tell the truth in this regard⁸⁹ but this does not mean that its poet was a witness to all the events that he describes. One has to remember in this connection the following observation of C.M. Bowra: "Even if a poet is close in time and place to the events of which he sings, he need not necessarily be very well informed about them."⁹⁰ Moreover, the needs of the narrative being always primary, the poet has to resort to inventions. "This is especially true of heroes' enemies, who come from foreign peoples about whom the poet may have no information."⁹¹ Further, the desire for simplification is quite often manifested in a Heroic Poem "by bringing heroes together at a single time in a single society, though historically they may be separated by considerable gaps of time."⁹² Many of the incongruities and incoherencies relating to the Rākṣasas, especially in the Uttarakāṇḍa, have to be viewed in this light. Notwithstanding the statements and events in the Rāmāyaṇa presenting Vālmiki as a contemporary of Rāma, the fact remains that the authority of the author of the Rāmāyaṇa in respect of his poem's material lies in tradition⁹³ and partly also in inspiration.⁹⁴ It is therefore indiscreet and unjust to judge the authenticity of the passages of the Rāmāyaṇa on the basis of historical, geographical and archaeological evidences.

Whether or not the facility of writing was available to Vālmiki, the fact remains that he conceived his poem for recitation before a

89. *Op. cit.*, Chap. XIV.

90. *Op. cit.*, p. 514.

91. *Op. cit.*, p. 532.

92. *Op. cit.*, p. 522.

N.B. The Rāmāyaṇa makes several ancestors of Rāma as contemporaries of Rāvaṇa.

93. Vālmiki receives the outline of his story from Nārada. R. I 1/1ff.

94. R. I 2/30-3.

listening audience. Conditions of oral recitation before a listening audience necessitate the employment of various techniques and devices on the part of the poets of Heroic Poetry. Naturally, these differ from land to land and people to people, but their motive is everywhere the same, namely, to command the interest of the audience and to make the presentation easily intelligible. Mythical and legendary matter relating to gods and ascetics on the one hand and the adventurous episodes of characters like Hanūmān on the other in the Rāmāyaṇa have to be examined in this light. Likewise, the accounts of stately receptions by sages and princes, boasts and harangues, repeated encounters between heroes and changing of forms or other forms of Māyā employed by Vānara and Rākṣasa heroes also fall under this category. As pointed out by C.M. Bowra, "The audience knows that they (such devices) exist, expects them to be used, greets them as old acquaintances, and applauds the poet who uses them expertly."⁹⁵ Instead of raising a finger of distrust against such passages the need is of sympathetic understanding of the cultural and literary traditions of Vālmīki's India.

The Rāmāyaṇa did not only originate in oral tradition, it was also preserved for centuries through oral transmission. Generally a tradition of oral poetry is maintained through a family or a place. In such a case there is a continuity which means that a generation tells the story of another in much the same way with many of the same details. Gradually, however, the story may travel from district to district and secure a nation-wide circulation. In such an event the tradition does not remain firmly fixed, with the result that greater liberties are taken with, and greater variations are introduced in, the original.⁹⁶

Indeed this has happened in case of the Rāmāyaṇa. The diversification of recensions and the growth of versions within them is evidently due to this very fact. When after centuries attempts are being made to detect these changes subsequently introduced into the original, it is necessary that the following points are borne in mind:

1. Unlike the Māhābhārata the Rāmāyaṇa has throughout retained

95. C.M. BOWRA, *Heroic Poetry*, p. 254, London, 1952.

96. For details vide C.M. BOWRA, *Heroic Poetry*, Chap. XII, London, 1952.

its homogeneity; even today it bears the stamp of single authorship. This patent fact rules out the possibility of wholesale revision or revisions, any planned reworking of the entire text. As shown at length earlier, all suspicions against the integral character of the Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍa are unfounded and all objections against them disappear on scrutiny.

2. The individual passages are not to be examined in isolation from the rest but in the context of the total design of the poem – the artistic characterisation and plot-constitution of Vālmiki – and the cultural background of the age of the composition of the Rāmāyaṇa known to us from the contemporary or immediately preceding literature. Grammatical forms and nuances of style (in respect of compounds, figures of speech and metres), if known to earlier literature even by solitary occurrence, have to be upheld as authentic in the Rāmāyaṇa regardless of their varying frequency in its different parts. The same test has to be applied with regard to the mass of information pertaining to the various socio-political institutions referred to directly or indirectly in the Rāmāyaṇa, with only one caution that the information about the three peoples – Vānaras, Rākṣasas and the Aryans – is not mutually confused.

3. The conditions of oral transmission do not admit the possibility of additions or interpolations alone; they equally presuppose omissions or droppings. In view of this fact the formula of giving credence to one Recension alone, or even to a majority of manuscripts, will evidently prove to be a blind formula and will not invariably do justice in determining the genuineness or otherwise of a passage.⁹⁷

The Rāmāyaṇa, no doubt, incorporates most of the characteristics of Heroic Poetry, but it is not just a heroic poem; it is much more than that, for it bears the stamp of the genius of Vālmiki. Internal evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa, supported by a long and continuous tradition of India, shows that the Rāmāyaṇa was a departure from the earlier literary compositions in Sanskrit and was a unique experiment. The

97. Valuable information pertaining to the Rākṣasas could not be preserved in the Southern Recension presumably due to the bias of its redactors against them (the Rākṣasas) or perhaps due to their indifference. It is found in the MSS. of the Northern Recension. This information cannot be summarily rejected.

Rāmāyaṇa is a *Kāvya*, the *Ādikāvya*, about the excellence of which its author was himself so conscious that he prophesied: As long as the hills stand and the rivers flow on the surface of the earth, so long shall the Rāmāyaṇa story circulate about the worlds.⁹⁸ The veracity of this prophesy is testified not only by the fact that the *Rāmakathā* has persisted down to the present day but also by the fact that it has manifested itself in countless shapes and forms in the literary and art-traditions of India as well as of several other countries. This is a self-evident and indisputable testimony of the intrinsic worth of the original work of Vālmīki and speaks volumes about the excellence of its matter and form. Vālmīki is acknowledged by celebrated Sanskrit poets like Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Aśvaghoṣa and Bhavabhūti as the *Ādikavi* – not merely the first poet of classical Sanskrit but the Father of Poetry;⁹⁹ and the Rāmāyaṇa is recognized by the Indians in general as not just an account of the conflict between two individuals or two cultures but as a representation of the victory of virtue in its eternal struggle with vice. Any research which tends to divest the original poem of Vālmīki of this glory, or in any way impairs its poetic worth, or attempts to disturb its organic unity is, to say the least, misdirected.

98. R. I 1/35.

99. vide – the author's "Vālmīki: An Ādikavi", in *Enquiry*, volume 1, Number 1, 1964 (Delhi).